

Random Encounters

The Crawling Jungle

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The Cult of the Ravenous Maw

The foul Cult of the Ravenous Maw is based in the stinking depths of the Crawling Jungle. New cultists are often indoctrinated into the ranks when the jungle awakens and manifests after its hundred-year dormancy; those creatures that don't flee in terror or aren't quickly slain by the jungle's dangers often become enthralled by the jungle's evil beauty. These cultists can be of any race, but they are most often elves since the Crawling Jungle seems to have a strange predisposition to manifest near or in elven lands. As part of their indoctrination to the cult, these new cultists are brought before the Ravenous Maw, where the fell energies of the N'gharl Seed infuse them with fiendish power (as detailed in Part 4 of The Crawling Jungle).



The cult typically takes only a few months to reach stability once the Crawling Jungle manifests. The cult itself is nomadic, since the jungle itself moves as the Ravenous Maw wanders the landscape, but the cult leaders tend to stay near the center of the jungle. All cult members have at least one druid level; none of them are clerics. All druids of the Ravenous Maw take the Tainted Druid feat as soon as they can since they have little access to normal animals in the Crawling Jungle to befriend with the *animal friendship* spell. Indeed, most normal animals wouldn't last long in the Crawling Jungle.

The cult typically organizes into one of four types of groups. Hunting parties provide food for the rest of the cultists, and patrols scour the jungle for any sign of intrusion from beyond its borders. Slave caravans are the only groups found outside of the jungle, since they stage raids on nearby towns and roads so they can kidnap more slaves (who generally have only short periods of servitude before they are sacrificed to the Ravenous Maw). A fourth type of group is the warband (an extra large patrol led by a cult high priest). These large groups are typically mobilized only if the cult determines a powerful enemy force has invaded the Crawling Jungle.

Typical Ravenous Maw Cultist Groups

Hunting Party: 4 acolytes, 1 marauder.

Patrol: 4 marauders.

Slave Caravan: 3 marauders, 1 priest, 3d6 slaves (usually 1st-level commoner humans).

Warband: 6 marauders, 2 priests, 1 high priest.

Acolyte: Druids of the Ravenous Maw are considered acolytes until they master the cult's traditional fighting style: dual-wielding a pair of sickles in combat in homage to their Ravenous lord. Mastering this style requires two of the following feats: Ambidexterity, Two-Weapon Fighting Style, or Weapon Focus (sickle). Since most of these druids have Tainted Druid as their 1st-level feat, they usually remain acolytes until 6th level. Those who have a few fighter levels (for bonus feats) or a ranger level find that, unless they have druid, fighter, or ranger as a favored class, their progress in the cult hierarchy quickly becomes stunted.

Marauder: Some druids have little interest in achieving the rank of cult priest and would rather wallow in the savagery of combat and the hunt. These cultists are known as marauders and are multiclass barbarian/druids. Once they gain the ability to *wild shape*, they prefer to spend as much time as possible in various *wild shape* forms, combining their barbarian rage ability with the powerful natural attacks of their new form with devastating effect. Marauders serve as the guardians and warriors for the cult.

Priest: Once an acolyte of the cult masters the cult's fighting style, she becomes a priest of the cult. Priests generally remain near the core of the Crawling Jungle so that they can better serve the high priests and the Ravenous Lord. They do accompany slave caravans and warbands as needed, but otherwise are only rarely found in the outer reaches of the jungle. Priests of the Crawling Jungle are expected to take at least two item creation feats as they gain levels; those who do not gain the ability to craft various magic items are quickly shunned, excommunicated, and eaten.

High Priest: Traditionally, only five high priests are active at any one time in the Crawling Jungle. The cult has no official ruling that keeps this number to five, but infighting and sabotage tend to keep the number to a healthy minimum. To achieve the rank of high priest, a priest must first gain at least two item creation feats in addition to all three of the cult's favored combat feats (Ambidexterity, Two-Weapon Fighting, and

Weapon Focus [sickle]). To prove her might, a high priest-to-be must personally cast the *awaken* spell on no less than three creatures native to the Crawling Jungle and must also be able to assume *wild shape* forms of at least Huge size.

Tainted Druid [General]

Your druidic powers are tainted by fiendish influences.

Prerequisite: You must forsake all that is good and peaceful in the natural world. Typically, this means you must be an outsider with the Evil subtype, possess the Fiendish template, or be undead. Other unique qualifiers could apply, based on the DM's discretion.

Benefit: All of your spells and abilities that normally apply to animals now apply only to animals, vermin, or beasts that have the fiendish template. You can gain a fiendish animal/beast companion with the *animal friendship* spell (but not fiendish vermin, since they are immune to mind-affecting magic), can summon fiendish animals/beasts/vermin with *summon nature's ally* spells, can *awaken* fiendish animals/beasts/vermin, and can increase the size of fiendish animals/beasts/vermin with the *animal growth* spell. You can also assume the form of a fiendish animal/beast/vermin with *wild shape*, although this feat does not allow you to gain any of the new form's supernatural abilities.

Introducing the Cult of the Ravenous Maw to Your Campaign

- The N'gharl Seed manifests somewhere in the world, and the surviving Cultists of the Ravenous Maw sense its return and awaken. The PCs might encounter one of these groups of cultists while on the road, or perhaps a group of them passes through a village the PCs are staying in and they start causing trouble.
- The party is called upon to protect a frontier town that has been attacked several times by a particularly violent and disturbing tribe of barbarians. These barbarians are led by several marauder cultists of the Ravenous Maw who survived the latest banishing of the Crawling Jungle, and they have turned their attention to building up a horde of minions while they await the return of their lord.
- The Tainted Druid feat could be used by any strange or sinister sect of druids in your world. Perhaps a wood that is rumored to be haunted is in fact the lair of a night hag druid who has the Tainted Druid feat and is attended by fiendish dire animals. The night hag may be searching for a way to transform all of the animal life in her wood into fiendish animals, just to make a home away from home.

Bringing the Parts Together

Cultists of the Ravenous Maw are certainly the most common foe adventurers encounter as they explore the Crawling Jungle. Perhaps the PCs run into some cultists after they've already been weakened by disease.

Coming in Part 4 of the Crawling Jungle
In the final part of The Crawling Jungle random encounters,
you'll find full statistics for Azuvidexus, the Ravenous Maw!

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